

# Support for formerly homeless people

Outline of a research project  
funded by the NIHR School  
for Social Care Research

## What services can best support formerly homeless people to achieve independent living and avoid repeat homelessness?

Over the last 15 years, the government has invested hugely in tackling homelessness and in working towards its prevention and alleviation; programmes and support services for people who are homeless or at-risk have proliferated. Nonetheless, the number of people becoming homeless is increasing. Some are newly-homeless, but many others have experienced repeat episodes of homelessness, including those who are multiply-disadvantaged, have complex needs, and require help to cope with independent living.

Some homeless people receive support after they are rehoused but others do not. Likewise, the types of support vary greatly, and little is known about longer-term support needs. No UK studies have monitored the progress of homeless people who are rehoused beyond two years. This study will build on the FOR-HOME study on the outcomes over the first 18 months for single homeless people who were resettled.

### This project

- will increase understanding of how practitioners can meet the longer-term support needs of formerly homeless people who are rehoused, and of the ways in which support is provided.

### It aims to

- examine the circumstances of formerly homeless people five years after being rehoused, their ability to sustain tenancies and live independently, and the proportion still requiring support
- investigate the characteristics of those who continue to receive or need longer-term support, how their support needs have changed over time, and whether and how their needs are currently met
- identify the roles of different practitioners (social care, health and housing agencies) in providing longer-term support to formerly homeless people, ways of working that have proved effective, and the challenges and difficulties of delivering this support
- contribute to policy, public health, commissioning and practice debates about the longer-term support needed to enable formerly homeless people avoid repeat homelessness and to rebuild their lives.



Improving the evidence base for  
adult social care practice

## Research project outline

### WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

Despite the rapid growth of government-funded homelessness programmes, the number of rough sleepers across England increased by 23% in the year to September 2011, and in London by 32% since 2007/08. Many homeless people have experienced repeat episodes of homelessness, and have multiple disadvantages and complex needs, including histories of disrupted or disturbed childhood, low educational attainment, long-term health conditions, substance misuse problems, and the need for help to sustain independent-living. Yet the availability, quality and duration of support provided to homeless people after they are rehoused vary greatly.

There is a dearth of information in the UK about the longer-term support needs of homeless people who are rehoused, and whether and how their needs are met. The FOR-HOME study (see Box) followed up former homeless individuals for 18 months after resettlement. No studies have monitored progress beyond two years. According to Homeless Link, there is only limited knowledge or understanding about “how to commission and manage a market for homeless provision within [local authorities’] adult social care teams”.

Tenancy Sustainment Teams were introduced by the government’s Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU) to support rough sleepers who move into permanent accommodation. Some local authorities and housing associations have established tenancy support or ‘floating support’ teams to help vulnerable people struggling to retain tenancies, although many have full case-loads and waiting lists. Some provide a generic service, while others concentrate on crisis intervention work or on people with mental health or substance misuse problems. Many agencies, including adult services, mental health and substance misuse teams, also provide support to formerly homeless people, although provision is often ‘patchy’. For example, evaluations of ‘wet’ day centres for street drinkers, and of day centres for homeless people, found that many

#### The FOR-HOME study

The FOR-HOME study (2007–10) was co-run by this study’s principal investigator and designed in partnership with six homelessness organisations. It involved 400 single homeless people in London, Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire who were resettled into independent accommodation. The participants’ histories were characterised by multiple disadvantages and problems, including low literacy, mental health and drug problems. One fifth of the sample had been homeless four or more times.

Participants were interviewed just before they moved, and after 6 and 18 months. By 18 months, 19% were without a tenancy, and many others were experiencing serious problems and their tenancies were at risk.

Problems included: issues with benefit claims; budgeting and managing finances; resolving rent arrears, utility problems and debts; disputes with landlords; renewing family contact; and finding work-training and employment. Many difficulties were related to underlying issues such as mental health problems. There was a weak relationship between the need for help and its receipt, and many of the most vulnerable were without support.

attendees were housed but struggling to cope and were receiving little or no professional support.

### HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

#### STAGE 1: Literature review

A literature review will investigate what is known about the rehousing of homeless people, their support needs over time, and the effectiveness of the support provided. Most studies of formerly homeless people come from the US, and have examined the influence of enhanced support services and case-management approaches by social services teams on their housing outcomes.

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#### STAGE 2: Fieldwork

The project will interview FOR-HOME participants five years after their resettlement, focusing on those who were still housed at 15/18 months. A total of 294 people (171 in London and 123 in Notts/Yorks) fit this criterion and it is anticipated that researchers will be able to trace and interview 210–235 individuals. Several tracking methods will be used to trace the participants, including approaching the relatives, friends and practitioners that they nominated, as well as checking the records and databases of the six homelessness organisations that collaborated with FOR-HOME.

The interviews will collect information about how individuals are coping with independent living, their longer-term care and support needs, and whether and how these are being met. This will include:

- housing arrangements and moves
- management of household tasks and activities of daily living
- income sources, management of finances and bills, and debts
- family relationships and social networks, including support
- mental health and substance misuse problems, physical health, and treatment/help/care received
- contact with support services and other agencies in the last 12 months
- perceptions of support needs, the benefits of help received, challenges in obtaining support, and unmet needs
- involvement in education, training, volunteering and employment.

The interview data will identify the characteristics of those who require longer-term support and how their needs have changed over time. Questions about their financial circumstances and quality of life will be taken from national surveys to enable comparisons with the general population.

For those consenting participants who are still receiving care and support from formal agencies, or have had such help during the previous 12 months, interviews will also be conducted with the principal or key worker(s).

These will include: adult services teams; tenancy/housing support workers; staff of homelessness services; primary health, mental health and substance misuse workers; and staff in services such as third sector day centres. Researchers will collect information about the types of support provided or offered, whether the provision of support made a difference to participants' circumstances, challenges in providing support, and recommendations for future services and practice. The project will interview at least 40 practitioners.

#### STAGE 3: Analysis and workshops

The quantitative data will be used to examine associations between various outcomes (housing stability, management of household tasks and finances, engagement in employment or training, well-being, and social inclusion), by personal characteristics (age, gender, background vulnerabilities such as being in care, mental health and substance misuse problems, duration of homelessness) and the receipt of informal and formal support. Qualitative data will be used to explore the types of support provided, reasons for the interventions, and outcomes. Interventions that proved effective will be identified, as will the challenges of obtaining/providing support. Practitioner interview data will be analysed to identify messages for practice.

Two workshops will be held with practitioners towards the end of the project to discuss the study's findings and recommendations.

#### Project publications

The main output will be a web-based Practice Guide targeted at social care, housing and health professionals, which will identify the characteristics of those requiring longer-term support, their support needs, examples of interventions and impact, and recommendations for practice. Other publications and dissemination events will include: reports of the literature review; 'findings' papers for *Inside Housing* and *Community Care*; papers for social care, housing, and social policy journals; conference presentations and seminars. As part of enabling evidence-based practice change, evidence will be submitted to government consultations on social care and welfare reform.

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### HOW DOES THE PROJECT FIT THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH?

The study will identify the characteristics of formerly homeless people who require longer-term support so that it can be targeted more effectively. It will also provide new understanding of the types of problems that they face in coping with independent-living and their various support needs. Through the first-hand experience of practitioners, ways of working that have proved beneficial, as well as challenges to providing support, will also be identified.

The findings will be of value to practitioners in assessing and meeting the needs of this user group (e.g. support planning, monitoring and preparing homeless people for resettlement and independent living). The web-based Practice Guide will enable the development of more effective user support and training/skills for practitioners.

The results will also be relevant for local authority managers and practitioners commissioning and/or developing support services for the homeless and at-risk disadvantaged groups (such as care-leavers and people discharged from prison), including rehabilitation, education and work-training programmes. It will also inform central government departments with policy responsibilities in this area.

#### The Research Team

*Dr Maureen Crane* is Reader in Applied Social Research at SCWRU (Social Care Workforce Research Unit), King's College London. She will be responsible for the overall design and management of the study, creating the database, data quality controls and analyses, producing the Practice Guidance and reporting. Over 20 years she has developed a sustained research programme, 'Homeless People and Homeless Services' which makes substantial contributions to theory, practice and policy development.

*Jill Manthorpe*, Professor of Social Work at SCWRU, will contribute to the literature review, ethical applications, report writing, the Practice Guide and financial management. She has worked on studies of social care for many years, including multiple exclusion homelessness practice, communities of practice in homelessness services.

*Dr Louise Joly*, Research Fellow at SCWRU, will be responsible for tracking participants and have a key role in interviewing. She will assist with the literature review, questionnaire design, data coding and analyses, consultation with practitioners on the Practice Guidance. She has many years' experience as a nurse in a specialist homelessness team and as a researcher on homelessness.

Project title:  
Rebuilding lives: supporting formerly homeless people to achieve independent living

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Budget:  
£215,523

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